

205hh- Jhana Is A Lifestyle

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(A Summarized Transcription Of A Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

“Jhana is an establishment of mind that results from your own efforts of purifying your lifestyle. It's not a magical experience that will purify your life for you. Jhana is one of the last positive symptoms of you healing the wounds of lust, hatred and ignorance.”

Mn.107 - The Discourse to Ganaka-Moggallana:

“...When the Tathāgata gets a person fit to be tamed, he first trains him thus: ‘(1)Come, bhikkhu. Be virtuous. Dwell restrained in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha, consummate in your behavior & sphere of activity. Train yourself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.’

“When the monk is virtuous... seeing danger in the slightest faults, the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(2)Come, monk. Be one who is guarded in the doors of your sense faculties. On seeing a form with the eye, don’t grasp at any signs and features (significance) by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the eye. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. On hearing a sound with the ear.... On smelling an aroma with the nose.... On tasting a flavor with the tongue.... On touching a tactile sensation with the body.... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, don’t grasp at any signs and features by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the intellect. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect.’

“When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(3)Come, monk. Be one who is moderate in eating. With a correct perspective (*yonisomanasikara*), take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, “I will destroy old feelings & not create new feelings. Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort.”’

“When the monk is one who is moderate in eating... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(4)Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the first watch of the night [dusk to 10 p.m.], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the second watch of the night [10 p.m. to 2 a.m.], reclining on your right side, take up the lion’s posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states.’

“When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness/vigilance... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(5)Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness. When going forward & returning, make yourself aware. When looking toward & looking away.... When bending & extending your limbs.... When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.... When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.... When urinating & defecating.... When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself aware.’

“When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness... The Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(6)Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw.’ “He seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body upright, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

“(7)Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

“(8)Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: joy & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation... the second jhāna...the third jhāna, the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“This is my instruction, brahman, to those monks in training who have not attained the goal but remain intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. But for those monks who are arahants—whose defilements are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of being, and who are released through right understanding—these qualities lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here & now, and to mindfulness and awareness.”

Nm: When it says “be restrained by the patimokkha”, we can boil that down to the eight or ten precepts and exclude the other rules which were pertaining to social circumstances at the time, so it's not just for monastics, even if you do not wear robes, if you want to practice then the rules of patimokkha apply to you, not technically but in the spirit of the eight precepts. That's why when the Buddha would speak about virtue in the context outside of the monastic sangha, he would speak about the eight precepts, which is the bare minimum for the beginning of that self-taming restraint. The five precepts keep you from behaving like an animal and you make

merit which will contribute to a better birth and so on. But if you are the one who sees himself as one who practices the Dhamma, then you know that the eight precepts are not negotiable, that is the bare minimum. So you can substitute the sentence “come bhikkhu...” with “ if you want to practice, ok, come here/follow me, this is the discipline that you must take on, and once you have taken it on, you need to start seeing the danger in the slightest fault.”

Now that can initially be taken neurotically, but that's ok, you will get used to the neurotic aspect of it, but still remain seeing the value of the discipline and the fear of breaking it. So in a way, if you are neurotic about breaking the precepts, that fear will actually protect your discipline. You are afraid of it because you know that it will undo your striving. Things that you want to develop through your practice can only be developed on the basis of discipline, so by reflecting on that danger you will be afraid of doing it and that's why you won't be careless about it. If you are not afraid about breaking the precepts, that's when you become careless because there is no fear of wrongdoing motivating you.

The common misconception, even with people who keep the precepts, who see the direct value of it, they don't see how it is helping them to tame themselves, they then keep the precepts out of faith, culture, tradition or whatever meditation group they are a part of, they might keep the rules on account of external circumstances motivating them to be restrained, but deep down they still hold a view that all these random things they do will somehow magically contribute to an experience of a jhana or enlightenment which will mean that they have no more work to do. In other words they don't see a direct link between what they can do through their own choices and development of the right context which will inevitably have to result in jhana and enlightenment, they just do RANDOM work which they HOPE will produce the experience of jhana or enlightenment.

The second part of the gradual training is guarding the senses. That's what peripheral awareness is, the non-grasping of signs and features of that which is seen (etc), it's not like you don't see anything. The signs and features of a sense object that you experience are always peripheral, you don't see signs and features. For example when you look at a sign which says “Stop”, you see the letters, the color and shape, but the significance of “You must not pass beyond this point, you must stop there”, that is not in the sign, yet you experience that when your eyes see the sign, those are the features of that sign, the significance of it. The reason I'm saying this, is because often that practice of sense restraint is conflated with a view that one must beat the senses down, by not looking, not hearing and so on, but even if you do that, you still won't see the significance of that, the signs and features of what you're doing, and that's where you need to start recognising the sense restraint to be.

When you are restraining/taming the senses you know before you do any action whether that act will be rooted in greed, aversion or distraction. But now let's say things surprise you, a sensual option arises and pressures you, then you have a choice to dwell mentally on the signs and features that are suitable for the increasing of passion or dispassion, both things are there, you must choose to attend to either one. Either way, pressure has arisen and you cannot undo that, you have seen something. You realize that you are only relatively in control of the senses, you can try avoid certain sights but still things can happen because the organs are still there untamed and when

that does happen, you need to allow things to endure without breaking the discipline, that's the order and that's why you have the discipline first.

If you were to be restraining your senses correctly, it's effortless. You don't need to be beating your eye down, cutting your ears off, etc, so that you never experience objects that might cause the pressure of lust or disagreeability to arise in you. All you need to do is to make sure that when your eyes do see, or when your ears do hear, you don't delight, accept, welcome, entertain the signs and features that are making lust increase, like the sign of beauty, the sign of non-agreeability, the sign of non-danger, the sign of friendly and non-threatening, all those significances are the signs of sensuality. If people were to truly see the danger of sensuality, none of that would ever again be seen as safe, friendly, suitable, pleasurable for me, it would be seen like a pit of burning embers, a poisonous drink, etc. Those significances are there, it's not like you must remove the significances of pleasures, no, you must stop entertaining them and look for the other significances that are equally there that you have been ignoring out of your habits of welcoming lust.

Q: I can attend to the beautiful significance of an object which will increase lust or I can look at non-beautiful significance (asubhanimitta) which would calm things down.

Nm: But not for the sake of getting rid of the beautiful parts or for the sake of getting rid of the pressure, those things are not yours. Your eye is pressured, and your eye wants the beautiful parts. All you need to do is keep protecting the context of the non-beautiful, the threatening and dangerous and keep it there, and it will prevail because it is the fundamental context. That's why the Buddha would say, in beauty, if you develop your mind, you will be able to see the ugly through it. Not change the beautiful and the ugly, it's still the same beautiful significances, but through them you see the ugly, you see the danger.

“...And how, Ānanda, is one a noble one developing the faculties? Here, Ānanda, in a bhikkhu having seen a form with the eye, there arises what is pleasant, there arises what is unpleasant, there arises what is pleasant and unpleasant. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the unrepulsive in what is repulsive', he remains there perceiving the unrepulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the repulsive in what is unrepulsive', he remains there perceiving the repulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the unrepulsive in what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive', he remains there perceiving the unrepulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the repulsive in what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive', he remains there perceiving the repulsive. If he should wish: 'May I, getting rid of both what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive, remain equanimous, mindful and aware', he remains there equanimous, mindful and aware...”

- Mn 152

Q: Do not grasp the sign of beauty...

Nm: Don't take it up, don't welcome it or entertain it. It's there but you don't take it up, and you won't take it up, if you start attending to the significances that you do not want to take up, the significances of danger.

Q: So in a way, you should grasp the sign of danger?

Nm: Yes, you don't start in a neutral sense, you don't start your practice whereby you have this equal choice of beautiful and ugly, you begin by being fully gripped and pressured by the beautiful. Your sense restraint begins by not doing that, so don't grasp those features and then the other features will become more apparent and then by all means grasp the feature of ugly, stick to it and it will develop dispassion all the way to final liberation. Those beneficial features are not visible because of the automatic grasp of lust - when you are touched by pleasure, the automatic grasp at getting rid of the discomfort - when you are touched by pain and the automatic grasp of distraction - when you are touched by neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. You guard your senses by maintaining the context that will make you abstain from habitually grasping onto the beautiful aspects of what is given, and that pertains to any given sense.

You only need to abandon things which are underlied by lust, aversion and delusion, don't grasp at them, and the signs and features which are revealed through non-grasping, you cannot grasp them in the same way, means you cannot delight or lust after jhana, and that's exactly how you enter jhana by fully withdrawing yourself from signs and features that are grasped with lust, for increasing of lust, ill will or ignorance. By all means grasp the sign of ugly but you cannot grasp it with lust, you can only grasp it with discernment. It is worth keeping in your mind because it results in dispassion.

Q: "When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties... the Tathāgata then trains him further: '(3)Come, monk. Be one who is moderate in eating. With a correct perspective (right context), take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, "I will destroy old feelings (of hunger) & not create new feelings (from overeating). Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort."

Nm: You need to then sustain the right motivation for eating, it's not optional. Don't think that by eating half a meal it constitutes being moderate, that's basically asceticism and it's often misguided. You should be moderate in eating, not losing the context for eating. How is that done? By not eating for the wrong reasons and eating for the right reasons, and that motivation is something that you can choose to keep in your mind or ignore. If you can keep that motivation in mind, you don't have to worry about overeating or under-eating. Often moderation of eating gets conflated with some idea like: "I eat only 20% of my meal", but that just means that you are still ignorant of the motivation behind your eating. Just because you reduce your enjoyment in eating to 20%, does not mean that your sensuality is not there. If there is any form of passion in regard to food that means you are not eating for the right reasons, which means you need to be contemplating and discerning those reasons more clearly, not just try not to eat less and less, which is what a lot of people try to do. Don't eat it if you don't need to, but don't not eat it just because you don't know where your motivation is rooted. The practice is about discerning your motivation and re-rooting it in wholesomeness.

You begin by eating out of sensuality, for beautification, for entertainment, you don't start eating with a clear mind, but if you eat just to remove the hunger, you will get to see what a burden and a chore eating is. If you sustain that correct context then all the previous wrong reasons will disappear.

“...Just as, Ānanda, a strong man would let two or three drops of water fall onto an iron pan heated all day: slow, Ānanda, would be the falling the drops of water, but then they would quickly vanish and disappear; just so, Ānanda, whatever it is, thus quickly, thus rapidly, thus easily, the arisen pleasant [thing], the arisen unpleasant [thing], the arisen pleasant and unpleasant [thing] ceases, and upekkhā is established: this is called, Ānanda, the unsurpassed development of the faculties in a noble one's vinaya, as regards to mental phenomena cognizable by the mind. Such, Ānanda, is the unsurpassed development of the faculties in a noble one's vinaya..... - Mn 152

You don't have to try and micro-manage your meals because trying to control those external circumstances won't uproot your greed because it is not in the food. All you need to do is sustain the correct context, heat up the iron pan, and your previous wrong reasons for eating will diminish.

Q: “When the monk is one who is moderate in eating... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(4)Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the first watch of the night [dusk to 10 p.m.], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the second watch of the night [10 p.m. to 2 a.m.], reclining on your right side, take up the lion's posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states.’

Nm: How many contemporary teachings teach how to purify your mind from obstructive states? Most of the instructions just tell you to focus on an object, but how is that purifying your mind? A person does these techniques hoping that no obstructive states will arise, but they are not purifying it. You cannot just start cleansing your mind because you do not start out even seeing your mind, let alone states which are obstructive for the mind. You need to first be well restrained with the discipline, celibate, seeing the danger in the slightest fault, not entertaining the signs and features that would be increasing hindrances, then be moderate in eating, having that clarity of motivation behind eating, because for most people that is completely invisible. Most people don't keep precepts or practice celibacy, most people live with a mind wet with sensuality and don't guard their senses, they don't even see the signs and features of the mind. When they hear about guarding the sense faculties, they think that they must not see or hear anything. They don't try to discipline their senses, they try to kill them. But if you do all the things that we just discussed, then you will have clarity of mind, which is protected through guarding the senses, you will discern the gateway where non-arisen unwholesome states can enter.

Being watchful of your actions throughout the day means that your mind is staying with that which is the priority, which is ‘the guarding of the gateway’ of your mind, so that there are no obstructions for it. That’s the sole task you have which can be outlined through discipline, guarding the senses and being moderate in eating. You will end up just having to guard the entrance of the gateway, you don’t have to be running around. The gateway is that one entrance into the city which is walled all round. That wall is your discipline and sense restraint. That’s why sila and celibacy is not optional if you want to practice.

Q: “When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(5)Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness. When going forward & returning, make yourself aware. When looking toward & looking away.... When bending & extending your limbs.... When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.... When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.... When urinating & defecating.... When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself aware.’”

Nm: To compose that previous wakefulness/vigilance even further, one needs to bring that context of wakefulness that you have developed, ‘the guard post’, and intensify it. You don’t need to be doing that in some formal hour of focusing meditation, but rather it’s done whether you are going to the toilet, extending your arm, laying down, cleaning, etc. So that even while you are doing all these tasks, the guard post is clear and you are not abandoning that one job that you have, which is to protect the mind from obstructive states.

Also, just notice at what stage in the training that the Buddha presents this. I say this because many people try to start here, thinking that by focusing on their hands or feet, they are doing mindfulness and awareness. There is no ‘focusing’ in ‘mindfulness and awareness’, it’s about developing the right context to an unshakeable extent. It’s about being able to see the signs and features of your mind, its inclinations and protect it from obstructive states before they even arise. The seeing of signs and features needs to be discerned in the background, it’s not something that you can stare at, because signs and features are in the background of that which you are attending to. You cannot see the mind as an object of your senses but you can discern it peripherally and know it. That’s the principle of *cittanimitta*.

Q: “When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness... the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(6)Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw ...’. “(7)Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty. “(8)Having abandoned these five

hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: joy & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation...”

Nm: If you want to abandon the hindrances which is a prerequisite for entering jhana, then you need to be dwelling with your mindfulness thoroughly established, which means you need to be watchful all the time, which means you need to be moderate in eating, guarding the senses, celibate and keeping the precepts. In other words if you want to enter jhana, start being celibate. You can realize that jhana is an establishment of mind that results from your own efforts of purifying your lifestyle. It's not a magical experience that will purify your life for you. Jhana is one of the last positive symptoms of you healing the wounds of lust, hatred and ignorance. Dwell secluded, removing grief and concern regarding the world, abandon the hindrances, quite secluded from unwholesome states, the pleasure of seclusion is born, you feel safe and that's the entering and abiding in jhana. It's not the other way round.

Jhana is a divine abiding, as the Buddha stated“ when the Tathagatas mind is in jhana, whatever he does is divine...”. You can live in jhana because the mind is purified, the senses tamed, the body guarded, the guard post has not been abandoned, you have not been giving in to that which makes hindrances overwhelm you, so you are freed from them. The important thing is that jhana is the “8th step” in the gradual training, which is where many contemporary teachings like to begin the training, by bypassing all the prerequisites. Which is quite convenient for ignorance.

If you withdraw yourself from the unwholesome, you don't have to worry about jhana, that is jhana. You don't have to worry about a technique, which incidentally you will not find in the suttas. The closest thing to a method is what we have just been describing, the gradual training - *Sekha Paṭipadā*.